

Rules of the Game

All About Movement (Part Two)

By Skip Williams



Last time, we looked at the basic rules of movement and looked at a few definitions. Let's take a look at move actions this time.

Movement and Move Actions

As we saw in Part One, you move whenever you go from one place on a battlefield to another. Usually, you move as a move action. Unfortunately, you sometimes use a move action and don't move at all, and sometimes you use a full-round action or a miscellaneous action to move. In Part Two, we'll look at moving and move actions.

Move Actions

It's important to remember that you don't always "move" when you take a move action. When a move action doesn't actually constitute movement, you can take a 5-foot step during a round when you perform one of these actions (provided you don't otherwise move during the same turn). Many of these actions provoke attacks of opportunity (all by themselves; move actions that actually involve movement can provoke attacks of opportunity if the creature using the action moves out of a threatened square. Here's a quick recap of move actions:

Move: A move is the basic act of moving your speed across the battlefield. You can't take a 5-foot step during the same round that you move. If you leave a threatened square while moving, you provoke attacks of opportunity, though there are numerous exceptions that we won't go into here.

Several skills either require you to move or are included in your movement (see Part 3).

Control a Frightened Mount: You use this action when you're in battle on a mount that is not trained for war. You make a Ride check to control the mount. The check is a move action for you, but it does not necessarily involve movement. If your mount does not move, then your action to control doesn't count as movement for you. Since you must devote your attention to the mount, this action provokes attacks of opportunity.

If you're successful with your Ride check, you can direct your mount to move, stand still, or do anything else it normally could do while carrying a rider. If you direct the mount to move, your check to control it and the mount's movement are part of the same action, and you still can perform a standard action during the round. If your check fails, the mount does what it will (probably fleeing from danger as fast as it can); you cannot take another actions and the failed check ends your turn (but see Part 3).

Direct or Redirect an Active Spell: Some spells, such as *spiritual weapon*, *flaming sphere*, and *animate*

rope produce effects you can direct as a move action. This does not provoke attacks of opportunity and it does not count as movement for you. Note that some spells, such as *detect magic* and *arcane eye*, require concentration, not mere direction. Concentrating on a spell is a standard action, not a move action. Check the spell description carefully to find out which action (if any) the spell requires.

Draw a Weapon: Use this action to draw out a sheathed weapon or other item that your DM agrees is reasonably weaponlike and stored in a holster or other convenient place where you can grab it and pull it out quickly. This does not provoke attacks of opportunity and it does not count as movement for you. If you have a base attack bonus of +1 or more, you can draw a weapon as part of your movement. That is, you can use a move action to move up to your speed and also draw a weapon as part of that move action. If you have a base attack bonus of +1 or more and you don't move, you still have to use a move action to draw a weapon. The rule reflects the flow of time in the game and the relative ease of drawing a weapon if you have even a modicum of fighting ability. Note that this rule applies only to drawing weapons and not to move actions in general.

If you have the Two-Weapon fighting feat, you can draw two one-handed or light weapons as a move action, or as part of movement.

The Quick Draw feat allows you to draw a weapon as a free action (whether you also move or not); if you have the Two-Weapon Fighting feat, the Quick Draw feat allows you to draw two 1-handed or light weapons as a free action.

If you have an item (even a weapon) stored away in a backpack, you must use the retrieve a stored item action instead.

You can draw ammunition for a projectile weapon as a free action, provided you've got it stored in a quiver or some other convenient place.

Load a Hand or Light Crossbow: You use this action when you cock and load a hand or light crossbow (loading a new clip into a repeating crossbow is a full-round action). Loading doesn't count as movement, but it provokes attacks of opportunity.

Open or Close a Door: You use this for opening or closing just about any portal of approximately your size or smaller. Opening a garden gate, a desk drawer, or the door to your house is a move action for you. So is picking a lock. Portals bigger than you may require full-round actions or even several full-round actions.

Just opening or closing a door (or other closure) doesn't constitute movement, and the act doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity. The DM might decide, however, that opening a really big or stubborn door counts as moving a heavy object (see below).

Mount or Dismount a Steed: Use this action to climb aboard a mount or get off. The act of mounting or dismounting doesn't count as movement for you; however, you must enter your mount's space to mount or exit the mount's space to dismount. You can enter or exit the mount's space as a 5-foot step (if the situation allows a 5-foot step) or as part of your normal movement. For example if your speed is 30 and your mount is 30 feet away or less, you use one move action to reach the mount's space and a second move action to mount (see Part 3 for more on the Ride skill).

Move a Heavy Object: Use this action to drag something (a treasure chest, an unconscious ally, or a slain

monster's carcass), push something (a loaded cart or a barn door), or manhandle something big and bulky into position (a statue or a banquet table). You and whatever you're moving travel across the battlefield, so moving a heavy object counts as movement. Since moving something heavy usually occupies your full attention, the very act of moving the object provokes attacks of opportunity. In addition, if you leave a threatened square while moving, you also provoke attacks of opportunity for doing that.

The rules don't give movement rates for moving heavy objects or for dragging things, but as a rule of thumb, there's no effect on your movement if what you're moving weighs less than your light load rating. You move as though encumbered if you move something that weighs more than your light load rating but no more than your maximum heavy load. If you use the dragging rule (see page 162 in the *Player's Handbook*) to move something that exceeds your maximum load, you move at half speed.

Pick Up an Item: This action generally involves stooping down and pick up something from the floor. Doing so doesn't count as movement, but it provokes attacks of opportunity. Grabbing something stored in a handy location (such as a tabletop or rack) might be a free action and might not provoke attacks of opportunity, depending on how generous your DM is feeling.

Sheathe a Weapon: Use this action whenever you have to put something away fairly carefully. Sheathing a weapon doesn't count as movement, but it takes some care and attention, so it provokes attacks of opportunity. Just stuffing something into your pocket or into a bag you have in your hand is a free action that doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity. In the latter case, you'll need a move action to locate and retrieve the stored item.

The Quick Draw feat does not allow you to sheathe a weapon as a free action.

Stand Up from Prone: Use this action to get up when you're lying on the ground. This does not count as movement, but you're pretty darn close to defenseless when regaining your feet, so standing up provokes attacks of opportunity. Getting to your feet when seated on the ground is just as difficult as getting up from a prone position and also requires a move action that provokes attacks of opportunity. If you're kneeling on the ground, getting up takes some time, but it doesn't make you vulnerable, so you use a move action that doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity. Getting up from a chair is a free action that doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity if the chair is fairly high; otherwise it's just like getting up from a prone position.

Ready or Loose a Shield: Use this action when you strap a shield to your arm (or grab a buckler) to claim its shield bonus to Armor Class. Likewise, you can loose a shield and sling it over your back. You lose the shield's bonus to Armor Class (the check penalty from the shield still applies though), but you have your hand free and the shield is hanging there, ready to use with another move action. Ready or loosing a shield takes time, but isn't too complicated, so it does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

If you have a base attack bonus of +1 or more, you can ready or loose a shield as part of your movement. That is, you can use a move action to move up to your speed and also ready or loose a shield as part of that move action. If you have a base attack bonus of +1 or more and you don't move, you still have to use a move action to ready or loose a shield.

If you've already loosed your shield (or you're just carrying it), you can drop it as a free action.

Retrieve a Stored Item: Use this action to dig something out of your pack or grab something that is stored in some other fairly accessible but somewhat unhandy location, such as a purse, belt pouch, or cluttered

tabletop. This doesn't count as movement, but it occupies enough of your attention to provoke attacks of opportunity.

A spell component pouch is fitted with all sorts of handy pockets and compartments, which your character is assumed to keep fairly neat and organized. Getting components from a spell component pouch is part of the casting time for the spell and doesn't require a separate action. If you're grappled, however, it takes a full-round action to draw out a spell component.

When Moving Isn't a Move Action

Several actions fit our definition of "movement" but are not move actions. Unless noted otherwise, you can't also take a 5-foot step during a turn when you use one of these actions. Here's a recap:

Withdraw: As a full-round action you can move up to double your speed; you can move in any direction you normally could move (including toward an enemy), and the first square you leave is not considered threatened. If you leave any additional threatened squares, however, you provoke attacks of opportunity normally. When withdrawing, you must use a mode of movement for which you have a speed rating (see next section). Withdrawing is a full-round action no matter how far you choose to move. You can't do anything else (except take free actions) during the turn when you withdraw.

If you're limited to only a standard action during your turn, you can withdraw as a standard action, moving up to your speed. If you're capable of using a full-round action, you must use a full-round action to withdraw.

Run: If your movement is not hampered and you're not reduced to half speed (see Part One), you can run as a full-round action. You move up to four times your speed in a straight line (or up to three times your speed if you're in heavy armor or carrying a heavy load).

Running represents an all-out effort to move as fast as possible, so you lose your Dexterity bonus to Armor Class (if any) when running -- you're putting your effort into speed, not defense. Running by itself doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity, but you are moving when running and you provoke attacks of opportunity if you leave a threatened square while running.

If you use a grid to regulate movement in your games, don't take the requirement for running in a straight line too literally. It's often impossible to move from space to space on a grid and maintain a perfectly straight line. Draw or trace a straight line from any corner of the moving creature's starting space to any portion of the creature's intended ending space. So long as the creature sticks to spaces that the line passes through or touches, it is moving in a "straight" line for purposes of the run action.

Technically, creatures that lack Constitution scores can run forever (see page 312 in the *Monster Manual*), but many creatures cannot run at all -- check their descriptions to be sure.

Though the rules don't say so, there's no good reason why you cannot run as a standard action if you're limited to only a standard action during your turn. If you're capable of using a full-round action, you must use a full-round action to run.

Move 5 Feet through Difficult Terrain: As noted on page 144 in the *Player's Handbook*, a creature that is

otherwise mobile might encounter a situation in which its movement is so hampered that it cannot move even one space. Such a creature can move 5 feet (one space) in any direction as a full-round action. Moving this way is not a 5-foot step. If a creature using this rule leaves a threatened square, it provokes attacks of opportunity.

It's worth repeating here that you cannot use this rule to move through impassible areas (such as solid walls), or move when you're immobilized.

Take a 5-Foot Step: You're moving when you take a 5-foot step. You can't take a 5-foot step during a round when you perform any other movement, and you cannot take a 5-foot step if your movement is hampered, if your movement is reduced to half speed, or if your current speed is 5 feet or less. As with the withdraw action, you must use a mode of movement for which you have a speed rating.

Bull Rush: As a standard action, you move up to your speed. To perform the bull rush you must move into your opponent's space at some point during your move. If you wish to push your opponent back more than 5 feet, you must have some movement left when you enter you opponent's space (see the bull rush description on page 154 of the *Player's Handbook*).

You can bull rush as part of a charge. If you do, you perform the bull rush instead of attacking your foe and you get a +2 bonus on your Strength check (see page 155 in the *Player's Handbook*).

Charge: As a full-round action you can move up to twice your speed directly toward a foe and make a single melee attack when you reach the foe. You must move at least 10 feet to the closest square from which you can attack your opponent and you must move to that square by the shortest path. If that path takes you through an obstacle or terrain that hampers your movement (including friendly creatures), you cannot charge. Though you normally cannot charge into or through a space that contains another creature, you can charge as part of a bull rush action.

You cannot charge if you're reduced to half speed. If you're capable of using only a standard action during your turn, you can charge as a standard action.

The procedure for charging is slightly different when you're using the Ride-By Attack feat (see Part 6).

Overrun: As with a bull rush, you move up to your speed as a standard action and you enter your opponent's space during your move. If you knock your opponent down with your overrun, you can keep moving through your opponent's space if you have any movement left (see the overrun description on page 157 of the *Player's Handbook*).

You cannot perform an overrun as part of a charge (see the [Player's Handbook errata file](#)).

Grapple: To maintain a hold you've established with a successful grapple check, you must enter your foe's space. Likewise, creatures with the improved grab special attack drag their victims into their spaces after establishing holds. Neither movement counts against a creature's movement for the turn. If you've already moved your speed or taken a 5-foot step, you still can move into a foe's space to maintain a hold and you still can be dragged into an attacker's space after it has grabbed you with improved grab.

What's Next?

Now that we've covered move actions, let's take a look at how speed and skills can affect or are affected by movement.

About the Author

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